NCA
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ELECTION '76: LABOR LOOKS TO NOVEMBER

ANNCR:

THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT IS GETTING READY FOR THIS YEAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN, AND UNLIKE THE SITUATION IN NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO FEW IF ANY TRADE UNIONS WILL BE NEUTRAL. CHARLES MEDD EXAMINES LABOR'S POLITICAL OUTLOOK.

VOICE:

AS LATE AS APRIL, THE STEELWORKERS WERE CAMPAIGNING HARD FOR SENATOR HENRY JACKSON, A PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNION WAS WORKING EQUALLY HARD FOR CONGRESSMAN MORRIS UDALL, AND PRIVATELY MUCH OF LABOR WAS STILL HOPING THAT HUBERT HUMPHREY WOULD COME OUT ON TOP IN THE RACE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY'S PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION. IF THE AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT WASN'T SURE JUST WHO IT WANTED, IT WAS ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN IT DID NOT WANT EITHER OF THE REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES, GERALD FORD OR RONALD REAGAN.

BUT A HANDFUL OF UNIONS -- CALLING THEMSELVES THE LABOR COALITION CLEARINGHOUSE -- HAD ALREADY GONE A STEP FURTHER. FORMED EARLY IN THE YEAR, THE NINE COALITION UNIONS WERE DETERMINED TO HAVE AS MUCH INFLUENCE ON THIS YEAR'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONVENTION AND ITS EVENTUAL NOMINEE AS POSSIBLE. THEIR STRATEGY CALLED FOR GETTING A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF UNION PEOPLE ELECTED AS CONVENTION DELEGATES. THE IDEA WAS JUST THAT -- TO GET ELECTED, AND TO DO SO THE UNION CANDIDATES RAN WITH COMMITMENTS TO SUPPORT WHICHEVER PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL SEEMED MOST LIKELY TO WIN A GIVEN STATE PRIMARY.

AT THE START THE COALITION UNIONS SAW JIMMY CARTER AS LITTLE MORE THAN A SOUTHERN ALTERNATIVE TO GEORGE WALLACE, AND THEY BACKED HIM MOSTLY TO ELIMINATE WALLANCE. BUT WHEN THE FORMER GEORGIA GOVERNOR STARTED LOOKING LIKE A POSSIBLE NOMINEE THESE PRAGMATIC

UNIONS DECIDED THEY LIKED WHAT THEY SAW: A DEMOCRAT WHO COULD WIN IN NOVEMBER.

THE STRATEGY WORKED. LABOR BROUGHT MORE DELEGATES TO THE PARTY CONVENTION THAN EVER BEFORE -- WELL OVER FIVE HUNDRED, THE MAJORITY OF THEM MEMBERS OF THE COALITION. EVEN BEFORE THE CONVENTION, THE UNIONS WERE IN A POSITION TO INFLUENCE THE PARTY PLATFORM, AND DID. AND AT THE CONVENTION, THEY ARE SAID TO HAVE INFLUENCED THE CHOICE OF JIMMY CARTER'S RUNNING-MATE, SENATOR WALTER MONDALE.

IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF DAYS BEFORE THE REST OF LABOR JOINED THE CARTER-MONDALE BANDWAGON AS THE AFL-CIO -- A NEUTRAL IN THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO ELECTION -- ANNOUNCED ITS FORMAL ENDORSEMENT AND ALL-OUT SUPPORT. MUCH OF THAT SUPPORT WILL BE DIRECTED AT MAKING SURE THAT UNION MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE LEGALLY REGISTERED TO VOTE IN NOVEMBER.

TO THE UNIONS, AS WELL AS THE REST OF THE COUNTRY, JIMMY CARTER IS STILL A STRANGER. BUT TO THEM HE LOOKS LIKE A WINNER, AND WITH THE UNIONS CONVINCED THAT ANY DEMOCRAT WOULD BE AN IMPROVEMENT AFTER NEARLY EIGHT YEARS OF REPUBLICAN RULE, AMERICAN LABOR IS READY TO TAKE SIDES.

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